

*Urges VA to Continue to Reach out to Veterans at Risk of Suicide*

**WASHINGTON** - U.S. House Veterans' Affairs Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman Harry Mitchell today called on Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) officials to explain why the VA has stopped airing a successful public service announcement (PSA) which has helped raise awareness of the veteran suicide prevention hotline and saved lives.

"Does the VA really think that stopping airing PSAs - even temporarily -- is the best way to serve them right now amidst an epidemic of veteran suicides?" asked Mitchell. "To be truly effective in reaching all the veterans who need help - not just those who are already showing up the VA and asking for it - the VA needs an effective outreach strategy. The VA tells us that the increased outreach is working, but then takes the public service announcements off the air late last year. The VA has an obligation to the 15 million who are not enrolled for care - not just the 8 million who are already enrolled. The VA can't just sit back and wait for veterans to come to them. They need to go to the veterans."

Mitchell chaired today's hearing of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee examining the VA's suicide prevention outreach efforts to veterans - including the approximately 15 million veterans who are not receiving care from the VA.

As Chairman of the Veterans Affairs' Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Mitchell has repeatedly called upon the VA to increase outreach to veterans who need mental health services and are at risk of suicide. Out of an estimated veteran population of 23 million veterans, only about 8 million veterans are enrolled for care through the VA [Source: [Department of Veterans Affairs](#), April 28, 2010]

As of April 2010, the VA has reported nearly 7,000 rescues of actively suicidal veterans, which were attributed to seeing the ads, PSAs, or promotional products. Additionally, referrals to VA mental health services increased. However, late last year, the VA told Mitchell that, despite the success, the PSAs had stopped airing. [Source: [Congressional Inquiry](#), March 2010]

Since 2007, Congressman Mitchell and the Veterans Affairs Committee have been examining the epidemic of suicide rates among Veterans. [Sources: [Mitchell Release](#), November 19, 2007; For additional information about the epidemic of veteran suicides: [CBS News](#)]

, November 13, 2007]

At that time, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had a self-imposed ban on TV advertising as a means to conduct outreach to veterans - including outreach to those at risk for suicide. Mitchell began calling upon the VA to reverse its long-standing self-imposed ban on television advertising and increase outreach to veterans who need mental health services and are at risk of suicide. In 2008, the VA reversed the ban, and launched a pilot public awareness campaign in Washington, DC to inform veterans and their families about where they can turn for help - which was ultimately expanded nationally. [Source: [CBS News](#) , July 14, 2008; [Mitchell Release](#) , June 18, 2008]

The nationwide expansion of the VA's public campaign has demonstrated significant preliminary success. In testimony delivered at today's hearing, the VA reported that, in Phoenix, for example, the VA saw a 234 percent increase in calls from the Phoenix metropolitan area within 30 days of the start of its local media outreach campaign. [Source: [Statement of Robert Jesse, M.D., Ph.D.](#) , July 14, 2010]

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